



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

**For Immediate Release**  
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### **Governor Kaine Announces Virginia Refugee Day** ***-Resettlement Service Providers Celebrate Newcomers Achievements-***

**Richmond** – In recognition of the indomitable spirit and courage of refugees from around the world who have resettled in Virginia, Gov. Timothy M. Kaine has proclaimed June 20 as Virginia Refugee Day.

In his proclamation, Governor Kaine states that, "Virginia's refugee program, as part of the national humanitarian refugee resettlement program, gives hope to newcomers to build a new life."

Since 2000, June 20 has been designated by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) as World Refugee Day. On that day, Virginia and other states, as well as resettlement organizations and volunteer agencies, will host recognition events to highlight the extraordinary obstacles refugees have overcome. The 2006 theme is "Keeping the Flame of Hope Alive."

Refugees are men, women and children from all parts of the world who are forced to flee their homelands because of wars and gross human rights violations. Often, refugees have faced persecution for their race, religion or political opinion.

Here are some facts for Virginia's 2005 refugees:

- The UNHCR currently helps 19 million refugees, displaced persons, asylum seekers, returnees and stateless people in 117 countries on five continents.
- In 2005, nearly 2,000 refugees and persons seeking asylum began making new lives in Virginia.
- The Office of Newcomer Services (ONS) contracts with voluntary agencies to resettle refugees in programs located in Northern Virginia, Harrisonburg, Charlottesville, Roanoke, Richmond, Fredericksburg and Tidewater.
- Historically, 55 percent of all Virginia's refugees are resettled in Northern Virginia.
- In 2005, the largest increases in refugee arrivals were in Central, Southwest and Tidewater, Virginia.
- New refugee arrivals include: Burmese refugees from Thailand, Meskhetian Turks from the former Soviet Union, Cubans and refugees from East and West Africa.

Virginia's refugee program stresses early self-sufficiency and personal responsibility to develop a comprehensive resettlement plan for each refugee and family. The Virginia Social Services System, in conjunction with other volunteer agencies, provides employment and support services, according to Kathy Cooper, program manager of Newcomer Services at the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS). "Many refugees leave their homelands with nothing but hope. They face significant language, cultural, and often physical and mental health challenges in order to become self-sufficient."

To mark World Refugee Day 2006, ONS will present an educational display based on the "Hope" theme in the VDSS home office at 7 N. 8<sup>th</sup> St. in Richmond. The Catholic Diocese of Richmond Refugee and Immigration Services is sponsoring free community-wide film screenings in Hampton, Williamsburg and Newport News, along with presentations in Richmond and Roanoke, for more information on this event contact Karen Kurilko at (757) 247-3600.

To learn more about refugee resettlement in Virginia, visit: <http://www.dss.state.va.us/family/ons>.

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